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ABSTRACT

Sixty-four women who hold positions in educational administration completed questionnaires describing themselves, their professional aspirations, their experience in seeking employment as administrators, the roadblocks they believe limit their careers, and the factors that have contributed to their success. Almost all the respondents hold one or more advanced degrees; 50 percent have doctorates. Two-thirds are employed as superintendents, assistant or associate superintendents, principals, assistant principals, or in other central office administrative positions. Sex discrimination, predetermined appointments, and negative attitudes of the hiring authorities were the major roadblocks reported. These interacted with age and race discrimination. Personal traits such as hard work, competence, good health, vigor and stamina, interpersonal and human relations skills, and persistence were identified as major factors leading to success. (Author/HLP)

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# Aspirations, Experience, and Roadblocks to the Hiring of Women in Educational Administration

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Women hold only 12.7 percent of public school principalships and less than 1 percent of school superintendencies today. The theories advanced to explain this underrepresentation in educational administration include suggestions that women do not aspire to such administrative posts, that they lack the necessary training and experience, and that certain factors in the training and selection process serve as roadblocks to them. An informal survey of sixty-four women has provided further insight into the professional development of women administrators.

Questionnaire Respondents. Because our survey was intentionally informal, those sent questionnaires were not chosen by any sampling technique but were women administrators known to the authors, or women who had registered with the American Association of School Administrators. Ninety questionnaires were mailed out and sixty-four replies (71 percent) were received. Not every respondent completed all parts of the questionnaire, and several, instead of or in addition to answering questions, sent letters describing their experiences.

The women in the sample currently are employed in twenty different states and the District of Columbia, with the largest number from Massachusetts (20 percent), Florida (9 percent), Illinois (8 percent), and Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York (each with 6 percent). Other states with more than one respondent are California, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. The women range in age from their late twenties to early sixties. The majority who reported their age are in their thirties (38 percent) and forties (43 percent), with the modal age forty-two; 27 percent did not give their age.

Marital status can have considerable effect upon a woman's advancement in educational administration where the ability to relocate at strategic points in a career may be critical. The majority of our sample are married. Of those giving information on marital status, 56 percent are married, 25 percent are single, and 18 percent are divorced.

Child care, especially when young children are involved, can place heavy additional burdens on working women. This is especially true for divorced women, who often do not

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have another adult to share such responsibilities. Most of the women who were or had been married have children (74 percent of those married; 80 percent of those divorced). The number of children ranges from one to six, with the average slightly above two (2.13). Divorced women have slightly larger families, averaging 2.375 children; married women average 2.043. Sixty-eight percent of those responding to our survey have at least one school-age child, but only 6 percent have preschool-age children.

Almost all the women hold one or more advanced degrees. Of the sixty-two who gave information about education, 50 percent hold the doctorate, 11 percent a post-master's specialist degree or certificate, 35 percent the master's, and 3 percent the bachelor's as their highest degree at the time of our survey. Several of those holding masters' degrees were enrolled in doctoral programs.

Our respondents fill a wide range of administrative positions in local and state educational agencies, in higher education, and in federal and state government. More than two-thirds, however, (69 percent) are employed by local education agencies (LEA's). These include three superintendents, seven assistant or associate superintendents, twelve principals, two assistant principals, and nineteen other administrative positions (such as directors of staff development, research, curriculum or instruction, program coordinators, and other central office staff). Another 18 percent are employed in higher education, as faculty or administrators.

Aspirations. Do women want to become educational administrators? A number of studies (Barter, 1959; Burns, 1964; Peterson, 1973; Timmons, 1973; Warwick, 1967; and Zimmerman, 1971) have found that women teachers do not aspire to administrative positions to the same degree as do men teachers. Moreover, the literature shows that women who have become administrators often did not independently seek out these positions but were encouraged by others to apply for them (Cobbley, 1970; Scriven, 1973; Zimmerman, 1971). However, comparative studies of women and men teachers indicate that the women received less encouragement to prepare for and to seek administrative jobs (Jenkins, 1966; Matheny, 1973; Taylor, 1971; and Warwick, 1967). Thus, the failure of women to aspire to such posts may result from a lack of encouragement.

The women in our survey already hold administrative positions. We wanted to see if they were satisfied to remain in their present jobs or if they longed for other posts with increased responsibilities. Each respondent was asked to state the next position she would like to achieve as well as her ultimate professional ambition. Stating a specific job for both questions (as opposed to a generalization about doing something else) can be considered to be an indication of goal orientation because it implies both an understanding of opportunities for and routes to advancement and a knowledge of the structure of the educational administration hierarchy. The observed relation between age and lack of professional goals may indicate that the women over fifty have encountered so much professional rejection in the past that their ambition has been extinguished.

In response to both questions, when specific positions were noted, superintendencies or associate/assistant superintendencies were most frequently named, particularly by those employed in LEA's. Several women employed in higher education aimed at college presidencies. A number of respondents indicated that educational consulting of some type was their ultimate professional aspiration.

With regard to the next position to which they aspire, 61 percent named a specific one, (such as superintendent or principal); 26 percent had a nonspecific goal ("other administrative experiences", "some position with equal pay and recognition"); and 13 percent did not state any immediate job ambition. Specific aspirations were more frequent among women with Ph.D.s than those with masters' degrees; the latter were more likely to have nonspecific goals. These differences approach but do no achieve statistical significance (probability of $X^2 = 0.20$). Women in their thirties and forties more often reported specific professional ambitions than women over fifty. These age differences are statistically significant (probability of $X^2 = 0.05$).

The data on ultimate professional aspirations are similar to those for the desired next positions. Far fewer respondents had an ultimate professional goal, however. Only 42 percent specified particular positions as eventual goals; 40 percent had nonspecific goals; and 18 percent had none. Women employed in LEA's were more likely to have specific ultimate goals; those employed in other educational settings, such as SEA's, higher education, or the federal government, were more likely to have nonspecific goals ($X^2$ probability - 0.10). Ultimate goals apparently are unrelated to degrees held. There is

more of a tendency for women in their forties to have specific professional goals and for women over fifty to report no such ultimate aspirations, but this difference, unlike that regarding immediate goals, does not reach or even approach statistical significance.

Experience. Each respondent was asked to list the types of positions for which she had been an active candidate since acquiring her current credentials, to indicate the hiring authority, and to state whether or not she was interviewed for the job. The mean number of applications was 1.43 (S+D = 1.50). Nearly half of the women responding (42 percent) reported they had never applied unsuccessfully for a position. Unfortunately, we cannot tell whether they were always successful in their applications or whether they simply did not apply. Fourteen percent of the respondents had been unsuccessful in one application, 16 percent unsuccessful in two, 13 percent in three, and 14 percent unsuccessful in four or more applications.

The data suggest that women with doctorates more often were unsuccessful in four or more applications (22 percent) than women without such degrees (6 percent). However, the relation of unsuccessful applications to degree held does not reach statistical significance ($X^2$ probability = 0.20). The data also suggest that the number of unsuccessful applications is somewhat related to age, with the younger women and those over fifty more apt to report no unsuccessful applications, while women in their forties were most likely to report four or more unsuccessful applications, (however, this relationship was not statistically significant). Women with specific ultimate aspirations are much more likely to have applied for jobs more often; those with nonspecific or no eventual aspirations were significantly less likely to have made many aspirations ($X^2$ probability = 0.05). This finding supports our interpretation of the specificity of aspirations being an indicator of goal orientation.

The mean number of interviews was 1.48 (S.D. = 1.09), only slightly higher than the mean number of applications. Despite this, many of the respondents included negative statements about interviews, often feeling apparently that the interview was granted only because the hiring authority sought to comply with Affirmative Action regulations. One woman stated: "I have been interviewed only three times out of about twenty-five applications and in each of these cases I had unmistakable indications that it was a token interview to satisfy some demand to interview

a woman." Another wrote: "From May of 1975 through June of 1976 I applied for 102 line and staff positions at the assistant superintendent and superintendent level. I was given two interviews and neither job was really open; I was the 'fly-in' affirmative action candidate, willing to locate anywhere." Still another said: "At the superintendent level the districts just seem to be doing their affirmative action thing which is to have black applicants and women as applicants in the kitty."

Perceived Roadblocks. The respondents were asked, with regard to unsuccessful applications, what they considered the key roadblocks. The most frequent reasons given were: sex discrimination (18 percent); predetermined appointees (17 percent); predetermined attitudes of hiring authority (15 percent); lack of appropriate experience (12 percent); racism (10 percent); and age (10 percent). For many women several of these roadblocks were operative.

Statements about sex discrimination and preconceived attitudes about women included being told that women were not hired as principals in a school system because of "custom"; that women are not aggressive enough negotiators to direct staff relations; that men do not want to take direction from a woman; and that the community was not ready for a woman administrator.

The note added to the questionnaire by a Title I supervisor with more than twenty years of teaching experience, who has made three unsuccessful applications for a principalship, may be typical. "Silly as it seems, the fact that I was a woman seemed to be the biggest obstacle. May training is as good as many men. My track record in school positions is good. I was told by a university advisory not to get my administrative credentials if I wished to remain in this community and use them. The situation is gradually changing with a new superintendent who sees women as people." One woman thought the reasons she had been denied a position were "predetermined attitude (really 'shock') of having a woman in such a position, plus predetermined appointees." Another commented: "The basic roadblock comes in that most upper and middle management positions are held by white males and few white males want to report to or be told by a black woman what to do or how to do it, no matter how super qualified she may be." Another noted: "The key roadblock was the fact that, in most cases, literally hundreds of qualified white, married male candidates with experience in similar positions were too sure a thing to turn down."

The double liability of age and sex was a particular problem. A twenty-nine year old woman felt she was deemed inappropriate by the hiring committee because she was too young, inexperienced, female to deal with rough children. "I do always feel that I must earn my credibility, that my competence is not assumed by those who don't know me largely because I am young and female. Men my age are often assumed to be administrators-in-the-making and are requested to apply for administrative positions." Women over fifty also believe their age militates against them. One of these (age 51) commented: "I feel that the public is not ready to consider a woman seriously and boards are sensitive to that. I must objectively note, however, that I am past 50, which is a 'magic' age for superintendency applicants, and this may have entered into it." A woman of fifty-three wrote: "I seldom apply for jobs as recent experience tells me that age is a barrier."

The combination of sex discrimination and race discrimination was commented on by several respondents. For example, "I am a black female and I feel that the factors that have contributed to my unsuccessful efforts to secure promotion and upgrading of salary have been sex and race discrimination. Most of the top administration jobs in this system are filled by white males. There is a policy on fair and equal employment; however, inequities do still exist." "Blacks don't get jobs until whites have messed up the system totally and the courts or expediency requires change," said a woman who had been told by one suburban district that they were not ready for "colored" teachers, and by another that they did not hire "outsiders".

Several wrote that geographical limitations caused by marriage and family made it much more difficult for them to move up the educational administration ladder. An assistant superintendent felt "the most difficult hurdle for a woman is appointment to a secondary principalship." One woman said: "Neve in a million years can you imagine the frustration. I am well qualified and have had a very successful experience base. Elementary principalships are open but I aspire to become a high school principal and superintendent." Another commented: "I want to enunciate for you my own personal advocacy for the right of women in educational administration to enter the specialized world of central office administration without being first or finally relegated to a position of elementary school principal."

Role of the Hiring Authority. It was obvious that many hiring authorities often were only "going through the motions" when they interviewed women. Many respondents mentioned predetermined candidates. Others described how attitudes of hiring authorities (frequently school boards or school committees) played a major role in limiting the hiring of women for administrative positions. Such boards not only held attitudes which resulted in age, race, and sex discrimination, but they also indicated a lack of knowledge on the board members' part about educational administration. One woman said: "School committees are an enigma--too often uninformed; they don't like kids or teachers or seem excited about learning." Another, now teaching educational administration in a university, believed there often was noticeable uneasiness in the interviews when she applied for central administration jobs in LEA's; this she attributed to "interviewers often being inferior in knowledge and experience to the interviewee." A former superintendent, now working in the Civil Rights field, commented that state associations of school boards hold extensive power over people and education. She quoted an officer of one such association as saying, in a case involving sex discrimination, that he could "show the board how to do whatever it wanted, legal or illegal, and how to get by with it." Another woman cynically wrote: "The most successful way to get a job is to have someone on the inside who has clout (power, power) and is pulling for you." And another: "Boards go on personal recommendations or reputations of well-known people in their area." One young black woman stated that, although she had been successful in her applications, the age, sex, and ethnicity of interview committees could be major roadblocks. "Being black, young, and female made each employment opportunity a major uphill fight and made me a very lonely person. This, however, has made me just that much more adamant about being successful."

Is There a Key to Success? Despite the obstacles the women who answered our questionnaire experienced, many have managed to achieve considerable professional success. We asked them to describe factors which might have contributed to their success. It was obvious from the wide variety of responses that no single factor opens the door to success for women in school administration. The two most often cited were good credentials and hard work, mentioned respectively by 10 and 8 percent of the respondents.

The success factors reported can be grouped roughly into three categories: personal traits, mentioned by 60 percent; situational factors, 20 percent; and experience, also 20 percent. The personal traits listed included abilities and qualities of a temperment. Hard work was first; general competence, adequate health, stamina, and vigor, and human relations (interpersonal) skills tied as the next three most frequently mentioned abilities; persistence placed fifth. Other traits included: positive attitude, assertiveness (without "turning off" too many people); acceptance of parents and students; ability to communicate on the community level; "chutzpah"; commitment to education; concern for how young people learn; determination; effective use of time; flexibility; follow-through; refusal to allow being a woman (pregnancy, young child, family responsibilities) to interfere with job performance; decision-maker skills; being structured and organized; public relations skill; being well-informed; willingness to work (both harder than males in comparable positions and beyond "the call of duty"); willingness to listen; willingness to resign if not promoted; and willingness to attend to career opportunities as they become available and to go where they are.

The situational factor most often considered helpful to success was contacts through professional relations in general, as well as males able to provide entree. This was followed by making immediate use of every possible opportunity and being in the right place at the right time; good luck; a mate who encouraged professional growth; ability to devote weekends and evenings to work tasks; encouragement from men in the field; opportunity to build a professional reputation; and opportunity to be visible and to produce.

The possession of good credentials was considered the most important experience factor. Involvement in community affairs and other meaningful organizations (such as political and professional groups) ranked second, followed by appropriate experience, and a good professional reputation.

Conclusion. The success of women in the field of school administration seems the result of a process in which factors such as "luck" or "Being in the right place at the right time" are as important as experience. This same process accounts for many of the roadblocks women administrators encounter--sex discrimination, race discrimination, age discrimination, and insincere hiring authorities (who have already decided who will be given a certain job, or whose minds are closed to the competency and experience of women).

Several women in our survey admitted that they did not or had not applied for administrative openings, but waited to be asked. As one said: "I've been programmed not to apply for positions that were perceived as being 'jobs for males'. I have been asked to assume each administrative responsibility because of my previous performance." This finding is in keeping with other research which indicates that women do no seek out administrative positions as actively as men do. When this fact is combined with the fact that women receive less encouragement to apply for administrative positions than do men, it is not surprising that few apply.

These women who did apply were confronted by further obstacles to success. We agree with the woman who wrote: "One's professional life ought not to be solely a series of struggles against prejudice and discrimination."

Sixty-four women who hold positions in educational administration completed questionnaires describing themselves, their professional aspirations, their experience in seeking employment as administrators, the roadblocks they believe limit their careers, and the factors that have contributed to their success.

The typical respondent is married, aged forty-two, with two children. Almost all hold one or more advanced degrees; 50 percent have doctorates. Two-thirds are employed in LEA's as superintendents, assistant or associate superintendents, principals, assistant principals, or in other central office administrative positions.

Sixty-one percent have specific immediate professional goals and 42 percent have specific ultimate professional goals. Specificity of goal was significantly more frequent among women employed in LEA's than those employed in other settings.

Nearly half of the respondents have never been an unsuccessful applicant for an administrative position. Women with specific ultimate goals were significantly more likely to have made more unsuccessful employment applications than those with unspecific or no ultimate professional goals.

Sex discrimination, predetermined appointments, and negative attitudes of the hiring authorities were the major roadblocks reported. These interacted with age and race discrimination. Personal traits such as hard work, competence, good health, vigor and stamina, interpersonal and human relations skills, and persistence were identified as major factors leading to success.